



[Clara Zetkin, 1857-1933](#)

Socialist Victory Only With Proletarian Woman

Clara Zetkin's speech at the Party Congress of the Social Democratic Party of Germany at Gotha on 16 October 1896 sets the theme which will provide the backbone of this ten-part course.

Says Zetkin:

"The granting of political equality to women does not change the actual balance of power. The proletarian woman ends up in the proletarian, the bourgeois woman in the bourgeois camp. We must not let ourselves be fooled by Socialist trends in the bourgeois women's movement which last only as long as bourgeois women feel oppressed."

“We must not conduct special women’s propaganda, but Socialist agitation among women.”

Zetkin continues:

“Therefore the liberation struggle of the proletarian woman cannot be similar to the struggle that the bourgeois woman wages against the male of her class. On the contrary, it must be a joint struggle with the male of her class against the entire class of capitalists. She does not need to fight against the men of her class in order to tear down the barriers which have been raised against her participation in the free competition of the market place. Capitalism’s need to exploit and the development of the modern mode of production totally relieves her of having to fight such a struggle. On the contrary, new barriers need to be erected against the exploitation of the proletarian woman. Her rights as wife and mother need to be restored and permanently secured. Her final aim is not the free competition with the man, but the achievement of the political rule of the proletariat. The proletarian woman fights hand in hand with the man of her class against capitalist society. To be sure, she also agrees with the demands of the bourgeois women’s movement, but she regards the fulfilment of these demands simply as a means to enable that movement to enter the battle, equipped with the same weapons, alongside the proletariat.”

The German Social Democratic Party was the leading centre of

this kind of thinking from before the death of Marx in 1883 until the Russian Revolution in 1917. Clara Zetkin was its principal leader in this field and by 1896 she had been editor of the socialist women's newspaper **Die Gleichheit** ("equality") for five years. We will return to "Die Gleichheit" in the next item.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Socialist Victory Only With Proletarian Woman, Clara Zetkin, 1896.](#)
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